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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 001578

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND INR/B
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
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SUBJECT: MINISTER DIRIR DISCUSSES ETHIOPIAN INTERESTS IN
SOMALIA

Classified By: ERIC WONG, DEPUTY POL-ECON COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.4 (B) A
ND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. In May 15 consultations with visiting Special Envoy to Somalia-designate Ambassador John Yates and deputy pol-econ counselor (note-taker), Ethiopia's Minister for Culture and Tourism, Ambassador Mohamoud Dirir (the most prominent ethnic Ethiopian-Somali in Ethiopia's federal government), said that collapse of Somalia's traditional social fabric had created a "siege mentality" among Somali leaders that could only be addressed through a comprehensive process of political consultations, not through a written agreement. Although situated in Africa, it was important to recognize that geopolitically Ethiopia was part of the Middle East, Dirir said, as one-third of all ethnic Somalis in the Horn of Africa lived in Ethiopia. Addressing Ethiopia's political role in Somalia, Dirir said that both Prime Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum had met with the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan multiple times, at the risk of having other clans incorrectly perceive that the GOE sought to appease a single clan group. Commenting on the role of other regional actors, Dirir called for an inclusive approach to Somalia that emphasized the constructive role Djibouti and Yemen could play. Reflecting the GOE's de facto recognition of all three Somali administrations, even while it supports the TFG militarily, Dirir said peace and development in Puntland and Somaliland should not be overlooked. END SUMMARY.

COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL FABRIC CONTRIBUTES TO SOMALI INSTABILITY

12. (C) Collapse of Somalia's traditional social fabric had created a "siege mentality" among Somali leaders that could only be addressed through a comprehensive process of political consultations, Minister Dirir said. As a member of the Dir/Issa sub-clan dominant in Djibouti, Somaliland, and Ethiopia's Ogaden area (Somali Region), Minister Dirir observed that as the Issa recognized a single "ougaz" or clan leader, the Issa's strong social fabric had prevented significant intra-clan conflict. In contrast, the current Somalia crisis had arisen from the collapse of not only infrastructure and government, but also traditional Somali social structures. The collapse of the social fabric led, in turn, to fear and mistrust. Former United Somali

Congress-Somali National Alliance (USC-SNA) leader Mohamed Farah Aideded had pitted sub-clans against each other (Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Sa'ad against Hawiye/Abgal). Somali clans had fought each other but also killed their own clan members, demonstrating that the current conflict was not a tribal war for pasture or resources but more complex.

13. (C) Despite having one language and one religion, Somalia was a "nation in search of a state." When the OAU dissolved colonial-era boundaries in the 1960s, Somalia objected, Dirir said, seeking to restore the "lost territories" of greater Somalia (Ogaden, French Somaliland or Djibouti, etc.). Although situated in Africa, it was important to recognize that geopolitically Ethiopia was part of the Middle East. One-third of all ethnic Somalis in the Horn of Africa lived in Ethiopia, Dirir said. The "power-mongering" Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) was using religious struggle in the name of Islam as a facade. Pakistan had established numerous madrassas in Somalia.

ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF AYR SUB-CLAN

14. (C) The Somali peace process had to be segmented, Dirir said. First, it was necessary to create confidence among the Hawiye themselves. Dirir criticized Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) PM Ali Mohammed Ghedi as a former veterinarian and scholar who was better with animals than with people. Asked whether, as a technocrat, Ghedi appealed to those outside his own clan, Dirir said that without support from his own Hawiye/Abgal sub-clan, Ghedi could not hope to be accepted as a leader among Somalis. Dirir said Ghedi was a political "novice" in comparison to Yusuf, and

ADDIS ABAB 00001578 002 OF 003

attributed Yusuf's political longevity to his ability to invoke and to appeal to his mother's Dir clan, as well as to his own Darod.

15. (C) Citing the 2000-2002 IGAD-led process in Djibouti, and subsequent talks that led to the formation of the TFG in 2004, Dirir stressed the need for comprehensive political consultations to address Somali stability. For most Somalis, a written agreement "has no value at all," he said. "Somalis need to talk," having suffered a "shattered psyche" from years of war. Somalis were keen to sign agreements, but implementation was a challenge. Amb. Yates responded that the U.S. sought concrete accomplishments, and noted that Amb. Ranneberger was to meet with President Yusuf in Nairobi. Dirir said TFG President Yusuf had erred in calling for exact dates to convene a National Reconciliation Conference, which was very "un-Somali." Dirir acknowledged the importance of ensuring that Yusuf's talks with Hawiye leaders continued, so as to ensure that the Hawiye interlocutors were not undermined. Amb. Yates highlighted the need for the TFG to reach out better to its constituency: e.g., the NRC had been announced in English in Nairobi, not in Mogadishu.

16. (C) Addressing Ethiopia's political role in Somalia, Dirir said that both Prime Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum had met with the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan multiple times, at the risk of having other clans incorrectly perceive that the GOE sought to appease a single clan group. However, according to Dirir, the Ayr were "not in a mindset that accepts peace," having profited from looting, anarchy, and war. Citing Ayr interactions with Sudanese interlocutors, and former CIC Executive Committee Chairman CIC Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed's support for Hassan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front ideology, Dirir asserted that Ayr associated with "terrorist groups."

DJIBOUTI AND YEMEN CAN PLAY CONSTRUCTIVE ROLES

¶7. (C) Commenting on the role of other regional actors, Dirir called for an inclusive approach to Somalia that emphasized the constructive role Djibouti and Yemen could play. Amb. Yates noted he had visited both countries earlier this year. Yemen was unlike other Arab states who lacked understanding of the region, Dirir said. However, Dirir added, when he had traveled to Yemen in 2006 to explain the threat posed by the Council of Islamic Courts, Yemeni security officials had asked whether Ethiopia was conducting such approaches in collaboration with the United States.

¶8. (C) Peace and development in Puntland and Somaliland should not be overlooked, Dirir cautioned. Institutional capacity-building by USAID and organizations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) could foster democratization. Amb. Yates acknowledged that USAID had conducted programs in Somaliland. Dirir advocated that the USG cover Somali issues from Addis Ababa, rather than Nairobi, asserting that Kenyan business leaders were corrupted by ties to Somali warlords. Amb. Yates responded that the USG sought eventually to cover Somalia from Somalia, once conditions allowed.

¶9. (U) Minister Dirir concluded by noting that tourism in Ethiopia accounted for only 3 percent of GDP. Ethiopia sought to have one million tourists visit annually following the celebration of the Ethiopian calendar's new millennium in September, but Ethiopia had "missed the boat" by failing to develop tourism facilities or promote privatization.

¶10. (U) BIO-DATA: Born in Dire Dawa in 1959, Dirir stated that he attended a Roman Catholic missionary school but then left Ethiopia for Hargeisa, Somalia, in his youth, due to his opposition to the Marxist Dergue regime which came into power in 1977. Dirir said he subsequently left Somalia due to his involvement in the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which sought the independence of Ethiopia's Ogaden area (now the Somali Region), and then lived in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Dirir received a B.A. in English Literature from Damascus University in 1990, where he fondly recalls being a

ADDIS ABAB 00001578 003 OF 003

student of a USG-funded Fulbright Scholar. Dirir claims to speak eight languages: Arabic, English, French, Somali, Amharic, Oromigna, Harari, and Tigrinya.

¶11. (SBU) Post bio-files (forwarded to INR/B) note that Dirir returned to Ethiopia in 1991, became president of the Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front in 1993, and then participated in the founding of the pro-EPRDF (Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) Ethiopian Somali Democratic League in 1994. Dirir was elected to the Somali Region's parliament in 1995, and then served as Ethiopia's Ambassador to Zimbabwe from 1996 to 1998. Dirir has held three ministerial appointments in the Ethiopian federal government: Minister of Transport and Communications (1998-2001), Minister of Mines and Energy (2001), and Minister of Culture and Tourism (October 2005 to present).

¶12. (C) COMMENT. Although nominally Ethiopia's Minister for Culture and Tourism, Mohamoud Dirir is believed to provide significant input to GOE policy on Somalia, as the most prominent ethnic Somali in Ethiopia's federal government, and the only Somali cabinet minister. As an anti-Dergue activist who returned to Ethiopia in 1991, he has long supported the ruling EPRDF and is currently serving in his third ministerial appointment under PM Meles. Dirir's observation that peace and development in Puntland and Somaliland should not be overlooked, highlights the GOE's strategy of cultivating close bilateral relations with each of these Somali entities separately, even while it backs the TFG militarily. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) Embassy Nairobi cleared this cable.
YAMAMOTO